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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, July 11, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOMESPUNS": Information from the Farm Security Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Early this year a group of farm women from 8 different Southern States gathered in South Carolina to learn the art of weaving material for their own dresses, curtains, table cloths and other articles. They used native cotton, wool and flax -- in the colors of the rust red Carolina soil, the white of the cotton fields and the blue of the Southern skies. For a few cents per square yard, these women have woven beautiful fabrics for their own use, which would cost several dollars in the best shops and department stores throughout the country.

This weaving project was sponsored by the Farm Security Administration. When Farm Security makes loans to farm families, the farmer and his wife work out what is called a farm and home plan.....a plan that provides for making as much of the family living as possible right on the farm. The weaving project is a means of making a considerable saving by producing materials at home, and may eventually serve as a source of extra income.

Early this year several County Home Management Supervisors and clients were selected for the first instruction in weaving. They were brought together in two classes, one at Orangeburg Farms and the other at Ashwood Plantation, both in South Carolina. The instruction was given by Miss Frances Van Hall, who has studied and taught in several of the outstanding weaving schools in the Scandinavian countries.

The women who came to Miss Van Hall's classes were to be taught the art of weaving in order that they could return to their own communities and teach it to

other farm wives. Most of them - both white and colored - had little or no experience in weaving. There was one woman who couldn't even read or write. But all of them were eager to learn to make the materials for clothing themselves and their families.

Their first lesson was in threading the looms. This is a very difficult and discouraging lesson for the beginner. Miss Van Hall spent nearly a week instructing here pupils in this one operation. The next week, however, the actual weaving began. Materials were woven for dresses, suits, upholstery, drapes, table cloths, jeans, bedspreads and for various other uses.

The six basic colors of red, blue, green, purple, rust, and brown were woven into a great variety of patterns. The patterns and designs were created by the women themselves under Miss Van Hall's direction. The designs they created included things familiar in their home life.... They used such things as the sunflowers, dogwood, magnolia, jasmine, acorn, and cotton boll.

By weaving their own material these women were able to make up enough cotton crash to provide curtains for a four room house for less than one dollar. The same cotton crash purchased at a department store would cost \$20. Beautiful, varicolored cotton plaid dress material was made for 20¢ a square yard. The average purchase price would be about 75¢ a yard. One of the classes made a blue linen luncheon set which would sell for \$7.50 in any shop. The material for weaving it cost \$1.25. A piece of upholstering material as fine as any you could buy for \$4.00 a yard was produced for 60¢ a yard. On the last day of the classes, one woman, - six hours time - wove a 6 yard piece of Alice blue tweed for \$1.10 per yard. The cost of producing these materials includes only the actual out-of-pocket cost of the yarns, not counting the labor. Eventually, Farm Security borrowers may be able to produce all the necessary weaving materials on their own farms. This will cut the cost of production even more.

A good many people have asked if it is possible to purchase the homespun fabrics woven by these Carolina women. But at present they are making the material only for home use. Undoubtedly many listeners would like to know more about the weaving instructions given by Miss Van Hall. Within the next few months a bulletin on the craft will be published. When it becomes available for distribution an announcement will be made through the Homemakers' Chats.

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